# *Islam and Society: Role of the Departments of Islamic Studies An Analytical Study*

• ***Prof. Dr.Niaz Muhammad***

•• ***Abdul Muhaimin***

***Abstract:***

*This study elaborates the connection between Islam and society and the role of Islam in the formulation and reformation of a society. This research highlights the need and the significance of the concept of developing a linkage between the religious and otherwise classes of society. The study primarily focuses on the role and the influence of the departments of Islamic studies in Pakistani universities in defusing tensions and promoting peace and hormony among various classes of society. The study includes an analysis of the visions, mission statements and the objectives of the various departments of Islamic studies in leading universities of the country. The article highlights the system of education in Islam and the problems in the system of education of Pakistan which play a part in the role of the departments of Islamic studies. The research also focuses on the role of the students and the teachers of the departments of Islamic studies in the light of Islamic teachings.*

## Introduction:

The standard of excellence in any society directly depends upon the quality of scholars a society has. If the scholars know their responsibilities and perform them accordingly, the whole society remains healthy and develops on firm grounds. And if the intellectuals of a society lack the required insight and foresight, the society flatters. If the scholars become materialistic and influenced by worldly benefits, it leaves lasting effects of common masses. As a result scholars lose the value of their say and advice to people. Real scholars are those who have vision which diverts common man from unwise and immoral to what is right and good. A famous quote of Albert Einstein[1] says that the world is a

• *Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, Aabdul Wali Khan University, Mardan*

•• *Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic and Religious Studies, University of Haripur, Haripur.*

dangerous place, not because of those who do evils, but because of those who look on and do nothing. Departments of Islamic studies have been established in almost all the leading universities of Pakistan. One of the very basic jobs of the universities is to provide the society with educated, civilized, useful and productive citizens. It applies on the departments of Islamic studies to a larger extent because religion is an essential and integral part of our society. The following lines give a brief description of society and its concept in Islam.

**Society:**

Man is by nature a social animal and he cannot live in isolation. He needs to satisfy certain natural basic needs in order to survive. He has to enter into relationships with his fellow men to live his life. An individual is a basic unit of a family and family provides bases for society. A society is governed and developed on the basis of two elements; first by the values of certain culture or religion and second by the laws of the state. Survival of any society either depends on focusing on the well being of an individual or on safeguarding the state. Political powers are needed in case the state the means to save a society. An individual, be who is the core of a society, is neglected if reformers aim to gain political powers. Neglecting an individual shatters the foundations of a society which ultimately results in the downfall of a civilization. Society is something that meets all these needs of an individual. One of the various definitions of a society is; ‘A human society is a group of people involved in persistent interpersonal relationships, or a large social grouping sharing the same geographical or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations’.[2]

**Islam and Society:**

Societies are built on various grounds such as race, language, religions and geographical difference. Islamic society is designed on very firm and balanced foundations. It gives a comprehensive system which leads its inhabitants to live as constructive citizens. According to *Sayed Qutab* Islam acknowledges only two kinds of societies; one is Islamic society and the other is illiterate society. The former is led by the norms of Islamic law and everything such as basic beliefs, worships, national and international laws, moral and ethical values all are governed by Islamic injunctions. An Islamic society does not mean a place where Muslims live according to their own wishes. And an illiterate society has no firm foundations and it takes various shapes with the passage of time.[3] The twentieth century of the Christian era, presents a decisive turning point in the history of Muslim community. At the end of the first quarter of the century the state of the Muslim world had taken a definite turn, and there were some signs resuscitation in the moribund body of the Muslim community. On the one hand a process of decline and deterioration reached its lowest ebb and on the other hand there was also a widespread movement towards revival and the beginning of a process of renewal.[4]

**The Education System of Islam:**

The departments of Islamic studies are meant to spread the true message of Islam and for this a profound understanding of the education system of Islam is mandatory. In Islam knowledge is considered one of the basic elements of the religion and the first verse revealed indicates the significance of knowledge and education. *Qur'ān* says;

ٱقْرَأْ بِٱسْمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ[5]

Read in the name of your Lord Who created.

The education in Islam is merely meant to achieve the pleasure of Allah Almighty and it does not aim to achieve any worldly goals. The real objective of education in Islam is to assist in fulfilling the purpose of the creation of human beings. It is to equip them with sound moral character, to eliminate the shades of darkness and illiteracy with the help of knowledge. The system of education in Islam is aimed to guide people to the right path and to help them live a pious life here and hereafter.[6] A few verses from the Holy *Qur'ān* are quoted to highlight the significance of knowledge and the people of knowledge in Islam;

يَرْفَعِ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ مِنكُمْ وَٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ[7]

Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees.

A few more verses of the Holy *Qur'ān* which lay the foundations of the system of education in Islam are;

شَهِدَ ٱللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ وَٱلْمَلاَئِكَةُ وَأُوْلُواْ ٱلْعِلْمِ قَآئِمَاً بِٱلْقِسْطِ[8]

Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and [so do] the angels and those of knowledge - [that He is] maintaining [creation] in justice.

هَلْ يَسْتَوِى ٱلَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَٱلَّذِينَ لاَ يَعْلَمُونَ[9]

Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know.

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى ٱللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ ٱلْعُلَمَاءُ[10]

Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge.

In the interpretation of the above mentioned verse *Imām Ghazālī* says that only the people of knowledge have the fear of Allah and those who have the fear of Allah are the best of the creations and it is obvious from this verse of *Qur'ān* that the true scholars of Islam are the best creations.[11]

In order to highlight the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in connection with the significance of knowledge in Islam, a few of his traditions are mentioned here for examples;

إِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ[12]

The learned are the heirs of the Prophets.

وَمَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ[13]

Allah makes the way to paradise easy for him who treads the path in search of knowledge.

فَضْلُ الْعَالِمِ عَلَى الْعَابِدِ كَفَضْلِي عَلَى أَدْنَاكُمْ[14]

The superiority of the learned over the devout worshipper is like my superiority over the most inferior amongst you (in good deeds).

أَلَا إِنَّ الدُّنْيَا مَلْعُونَةٌ مَلْعُونٌ مَا فِيهَا إِلَّا ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ وَمَا وَالَاهُ وَعَالِمٌ أَوْ مُتَعَلِّمٌ[15]

Be warned! Indeed this world and whatever it contains is redundant except remembrance of Allah and what contributes towards it and the teachers and the students.

The system of education in Islam is very different of its contemporary educational systems. It stands tall and firm on divinely foundations. All those flaws and problems which our educational systems contain can be eradicated if the Islamic system of education is adopted.

**System of Education in Pakistan:**

It is equally important to take the system of education in our country before discussing the role of the departments of Islamic studies because these departments are part of the education and parcel system of Pakistan.

The Education Sector in Pakistan suffers from insufficient financial input, low levels of efficiency for implementation of programs, and poor quality of management, monitoring, supervision and teaching. As a result, Pakistan has one of the lowest rates of literacy in the world, and the lowest among countries of comparative resources and social/economic situations. With a per capita income of over $450 Pakistan has an adult literacy rate of 49%, while both Vietnam and India with less per capita income have literacy rates of 94% and 52%, respectively (Human Development Centre, 1998). Literacy is higher in urban areas and in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab, among the higher income group, and in males.[16] Few of the major issue of the education system in Pakistan are the lack of qualitative and quantitative dimensions, gender difference, relevance of education, inadequate research activities, lack of educational objectives, multiple systems of education, secularization of education,

professional trainings of teachers, poor examination system, low enrollment rate, out dated curriculum, administration and supervision, political interference, educational policies, the system of appointment of teachers, etc.

**The Role of the Departments of Islamic Studies:**

Universities are supposed to do three things; firstly to provide good and advanced education to their students, secondly to give suggestions to government in issues related to governance and lastly to promote the culture of learning and research in society.[17]

Like many other departments of the universities, the departments of Islamic studies also meant to award degrees of higher education in Islamic studies. As a matter of fact awarding degrees is not the only responsibility of these departments; rather it is much more than that.

Islamic universities and institutions of learning have existed for centuries. They were institutions essentially established with the objectives of providing and catering for the spiritual, moral and material of the entire members of the society in order to have successful and meaningful lives here and hereafter. These have been the central focus and objectives of Islamic universities both ancient and modern. Thus the objectives go beyond worldly achievements.[18]

Most departments of Islamic studies have got no vision, mission statements and objectives. In case some departments have any vision, mission statements and objectives, the teachers and the students are not aware of these. There are no plans for the execution of these visions, mission statements and objectives. There is no analysis of what has been achieved out of the objectives set by a certain department. What are the outcomes and impacts of these vision, mission statements and objectives and what are the reasons of the shortfalls. As examples vision, mission statements and objectives of few departments are mentioned here;

The vision statement of the department of Islamic studies, university of Peshawar states; 'sharing towards making of a knowledgeable, tolerant, prosperous and refined society united under the banner of *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*'.[19]

The faculty of Arabic and Islamic studies in Allama Iqbal Open University is one of the leading faculties of Islamic studies in the country. Titles under all the departments of the faculty, such as introduction, objectives and future plans are lying vacant.[20]

Objective statements of another faculty of Islamic studies in International Islamic University, Islamabad comprises of the following;

- To produce competent scholars who are well versed in basic Islamic disciplines and capable of guiding Muslim Ummah in moulding its life in accordance with the teaching of Islam.
- To produce scholars who have clear perception of the contemporary Muslim society.
- To enlighten the students on modern methods and techniques of *Da'wah.*
- To familiarize the Muslim youth with contemporary ideologies threatening the very existence of Muslim communities.
- To educate the students about the modern sociological and psychological theories.[21]

The mission statement of the department of Islamic studies *'Abdul Walī Khān* University Mardan says that this Department under the noble guidance of highly qualified and well reputed faculty members will produce a team of scholars who would be free from all bonds of sectarianism, partiality and would be able to propagate a true moderate picture of Islam. This is also envisaged to produce such scholars of Islam who would be compatible with the fast changing global scenario, and they would have complete grasp of the demand of the new millennium.[22]

Department of Islamic studies, university of Malakand has set the following objectives;

- Promoting Islamic thought
- Rectifying unsound ideas and misconceptions about Islam
- Highlighting the Islamic contributions and its impact on human civilizations
- Promoting dialogue and cooperation between different schools of Islamic jurisprudence
- Strengthening intellectual links between Muslim scholars.[23]

There is a huge gap between Islamic thought and social narratives and there is a dire need that intellectuals highlight the reasons of this gap and come up with means to lessen this gap. The division of knowledge into religious and otherwise has resulted in the form of communication gap between the experts of religion and modern educated class.[24]

It is now the responsibilities of the departments of Islamic studies to find common grounds to bridge that gap through constructive and positive dialogue. And for this these departments will have to create such intellectuals who are equipped with true knowledge of Islam and required skills to perform this important task. These departments will have to develop such thinking which can provide real leadership to society. And for this the role of the students and the teachers of the departments of Islamic studies cannot be neglected.

**The Role of the Students of the Departments of Islamic Studies:**

The students are the real assets of any country and they guarantee a bright future for any nation. All kinds of developments in a country depend of the quality of its students produced by its various educational institutions.

Unfortunately the majority of students in our country desire good jobs and better facilities more than better education and training and they approach educational institution just to attain degrees which is a self-centered approach. This mind-set is against larger national interests of any nation. Exalted human values and honest desires and intentions to serve people should be the aims of students.[25] And it applies of the students of the departments of Islamic studies more than anyone else.

The Islamic teachings are very encouraging and helpful for students of Islamic studies to build their character on firm grounds and become productive and useful citizens of any society. For instance Prophet Muhammad PBUH said;

لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ لَمْ يَرْحَمْ صَغِيرَنَا وَيُوَقِّرْ كَبِيرَنَا[26]

Anyone who does not show mercy to our young ones and respect our elders is not one of us.

إِنَّمَا أَنَا لَكُمْ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْوَالِدِ أُعَلِّمُكُمْ.....[27]

I am like father to you, I teach you…..

تعلموا العلم وتعلموا له السكينة والوقار[28]

Learn knowledge and learn serenity and dignity for knowledge.

كل من سمعت منه حديثا فأنا له عبد[29]

Anyone, I have learnt a *Ḥadith* from him, I am (like) a slave to him.

فَإِنَّمَا شِفَاءُ الْعِيِّ السُّؤَالُ[30]

Verily the treatment to dependence (in knowledge) is questioning.

**The Role of the Teachers of Departments of Islamic Studies:**

In order to influence a society, a good scholar must possess three qualities; knowledge, ability and longing to awaken society.

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظّاً غَلِيظَ ٱلْقَلْبِ لاَنْفَضُّواْ مِنْ حَوْلِكَ[31]

So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you.

يٰأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ لاَ يَسْخَرْ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ[32]

O you who have believed! Let not a people ridicule (another) people.

مَنْ سُئِلَ عَنْ عِلْمٍ عَلِمَهُ ثُمَّ كَتَمَهُ أُلْجِمَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ بِلِجَامٍ مِنْ نَار[33]

He who is asked about knowledge and he conceals it; will be bridled with a bridle of fire on the day of resurrection.

حَدِّثُوا النَّاسَ بِمَا يَعْرِفُونَ[34]

Narrate *Aḥādith* to people according to their ability (and capacity).

الدِّينُ النَّصِيحَة[35]

Religion is goodwill and benevolence

حَقُّ الْمُسْلِمِ عَلَى الْمُسْلِمِ سِتٌّ ...اسْتَنْصَحَكَ فَانْصَحْ لَهُ[36]

Six are the rights of Muslim over another Muslim … when he seeks your council, give him.

*Makhlad Ibn Ḥusyn Ibn Mubārak*[37] once said that they were more willing and keen to learn respect and obedience in comparison to the learning of *Ḥadith* itself.[38]

*Imām Dhahabī* makes a mention of *'Isā Ibn Yūnas*[39] that he has not seen anyone like him. He was offered hundred thousand Dirhams and he did not accept them by saying people would that *'Isā* takes money for the teaching knowledge.[40] *Sufyān Ibn 'Uyinah* says that he was bestowed a very sound understanding of *Qur'ān.* But it was taken from me when I took money from *Abū Ja'far Al Manṣūr.*[41]

مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ عِلْمًا مِمَّا يُبْتَغَى بِهِ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَا يَتَعَلَّمُهُ إِلَّا لِيُصِيبَ بِهِ عَرَضًا مِنْ الدُّنْيَا لَمْ يَجِدْ عَرْفَ الْجَنَّةِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَعْنِي رِيحَهَا[42]

He who does not acquire knowledge with the sole intention of seeking the Pleasure of Allah but for worldly gain, will not smell the fragrance of paradise on the Day of Resurrection.

Knowledge and piety are in sequential and parallel. Increase in knowledge brings more and more fear of Allah. A knowledge which does not bring piety and righteousness cannot benefit its holder.[43]

Issues where there is difference of opinion one should remain open and broad minded. There are various issues where there is room for debate and argument and this difference of opinion opens the door of *Ijtihād.* It is not appropriate for a teacher of Islamic studies to convert this difference of opinion into hatred, envy, malice and enmity.[44]

Teachers' responsibility of reformation is a continuous and endless job. It is spiritual renovation which is not limited to time or conditions like other physical reforms.[45]

The challenges of modern day are more intellectual than before. Educational institutions have become battle fields and educational systems and means of communications are the weapons of this battle field.[46]

Religious scholars can be classified into three categories; public, private and dual intellectuals. A public intellectual is usually a university professor who goes about researching, writing, and sharing their idea through books, conference, talks on radio, television, etc. A public intellectual uses his intellect for the benefit of private groups and dual intellectuals excel in both the spheres.

**What needs to be done:**

Islam has got a very close relationship with society and as the custodian and icon of Islam departments of Islamic studies have to play a very vital and critical role in the formation of society. The very first thing that needs to be addressed is to consider the difference between state and society. And for this social institutions need to be strengthened and the students of the departments of Islamic studies with the help of their teachers can do this. The centre of attention and reformation must be society and not the state. In case state is preferred over

society, acquiring the political powers becomes the goal which results in the form of the negligence of individual and ultimately the reformation of a society become secondary. Sanctifying ourselves depends of the sanctification of the knowledge we have and this will result in the purification of society. This will restructure and reshape our society which will ultimately lead towards a better and greater civilization. Modern day societies have become very complex and many such issues arise which need to be addressed in the light of Islamic teachings which are very explicit on the matters related to societies. There is a need to have a through accountability of our vision and foresight in the light of the following verse;

وَجَعَلَهَا كَلِمَةً بَاقِيَةً فِي عَقِبِهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ[47]

And he made it a word remaining among his descendants that they might return (to it).

There is a need to return to this word and interpret it in a way that it addresses the modern day social issue because it is sent for all the times and conditions to come till the day of resurrection. A famous saying of the first caliph *Abū Bakr* enlightens on issues where guidance is need;

إِنَّهُ قد انقطع الوحيُ ، وتَمَّ الدِّينُ ، أَيَنْقُصُ وأنا حَيّ[48]

The revelation has ceased, and the religion has accomplished, how this (religion) could be alleviated when I am alive.

Society would move in right direction as long as its intellectuals comprehend the real spirit of religion and come up with its practical and acceptable interpretations. A woman asked *Abū Bakr* that how long they will enjoy the good order of Islam which Allah has sent after the days of ignorance and he replied with the following words;

بَقَاؤُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مَا اسْتَقَامَتْ بِكُمْ أَئِمَّتُكُمْ[49]

You will enjoy it as long as your religious scholars keep on abiding by its rules and regulations.

This can be debated that there are many other factors of the downfall of the society but this cannot be argued that the departments of Islamic studies have to play their part in the reformation of society. And this is a matter of their own good benefit and the survival which has been highlighted in the following saying of the Prophet PBUH;

مَنْ دَلَّ عَلَى خَيْرٍ فَلَهُ مِثْلُ أَجْرِ فَاعِلِهِ[50]

The one who guides someone to a good (deed), he will get the reward like the reward of one who does it (good deed).

There is a dire need to see the challenges of modern age such as globalization, materialism, intellectual apostasy, the issues of youth, western psyche, questions raised by the western world and their replies at same scholarly level, atheism, heathenry, heresy and secularism in Muslim states etc. The conspiracy theory will not work anymore and solid scholarly contributions are

required. The gap between two different worlds of scholars and common man has to come to an end now. The time has come to ignore the internal difference and biasness which are one of the major cause of decline of society at all levels. New dimensions of knowledge and revision of the styles and patterns of research will help the cause. Four important things which needs to be focused on are; self awareness as a teacher, character building of students, reformation in institutes and the welfare and well being of society through positive and productive measures.

**Conclusion:**

No society can deny or keep away from external elements and dangers. Intellectuals in every society perceive such elements and come up with required guidance. Islam being a complete code of life provides guidance in all the matters related to this world or hereafter. Confining Islam to the spiritual matters cannot be justified by any means. This comprehensive guidance of Islam demands the formulation of a stance encompassing the needs of an individual, society and international community. Our social movements and efforts of reformation could not produce a solid intellectual thought on firm moral grounds. This has resulted in the form of extremism, sectarianism, biasness and malice in race, color, regions and religious affiliations. Universities are meant and expected to formulate mental attitude and notions which can lead societies in right direction. Departments of Islamic studies will have to realize their responsibilities in this regard and adopt such measures which make sure that these departments are aware of what is expected of them in terms of the reformation of society.

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[43] Abū Ḥamzah, ʻAbdul Khāliq, *ʻIlm or* Taqwah, (Lahore: *Anṣār* Publications, 2008), 34.

[44] Muhammad Ibn Ṣāleḥ, *'Ilm Kay* Aādāb, (Lahore: The Book Centre, 2005), 41.

[45] Nadvī, Sayīd Abū Al Ḥasan, *The Status and the Responsibilities of 'Ulama*, (Raye Bareli: *Sayīd Aḥmad Shahīd* Academy, 2012), 36.

[46] 'Alvī, Thurayyah Batūl, *Ustād, Millat Ka* Muḥāfiẓ, (Lahore: *Tanẓīm Asatadhah* Pakistan, 2006), 18.

[47] *Sūrah Al Zukhraf* (43:28).

[48] *Jāmi' Al Uṣūl Fi Aḥādith Al Rasūl*, v. 8, p. 605.

[49] *Saḥiḥ Bukhārī,* v. 12, p. 206.

[50] *Saḥiḥ Muslim,* v. 9, p. 486.